

**HERO**

**HOLIDAY SPECIAL**



**PREMIERE  
EDITION**

**BOW**



BY **JEFF SMITH**





## ***Holiday Special***

***By Jeff Smith***

*After being run out of Boneville, the three Bone cousins, Fone Bone, Phoney Bone, and Smiley Bone, are separated and lost in a vast uncharted desert.*

*One by one they find their way into a deep, forested valley filled with wonderful and terrifying creatures...*

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*We peek ahead to the Bone cousins' second winter in the valley; and their first holiday celebrations with Thorn and Gran'ma Ben. This seasonal story was done especially for this HERO preview and will not be seen again until it is reprinted, in continuity, in a future volume of The Complete Bone Adventures.*

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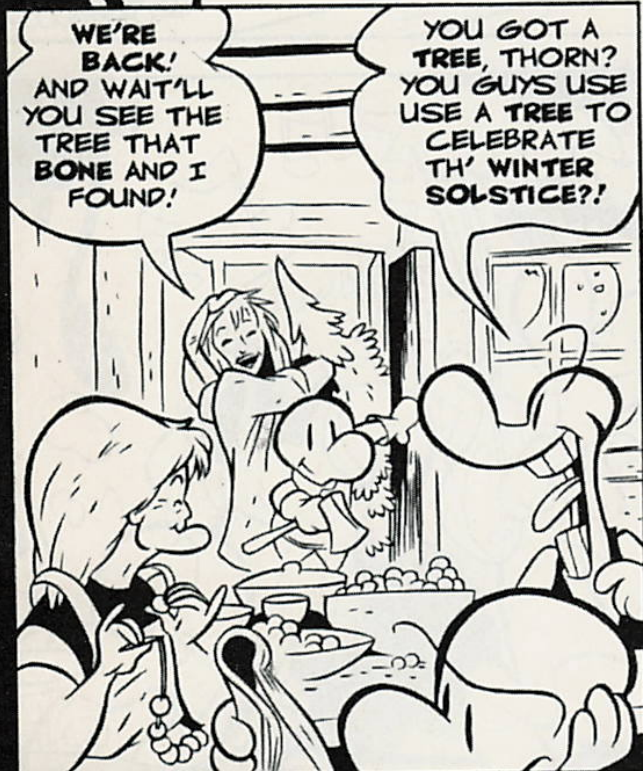
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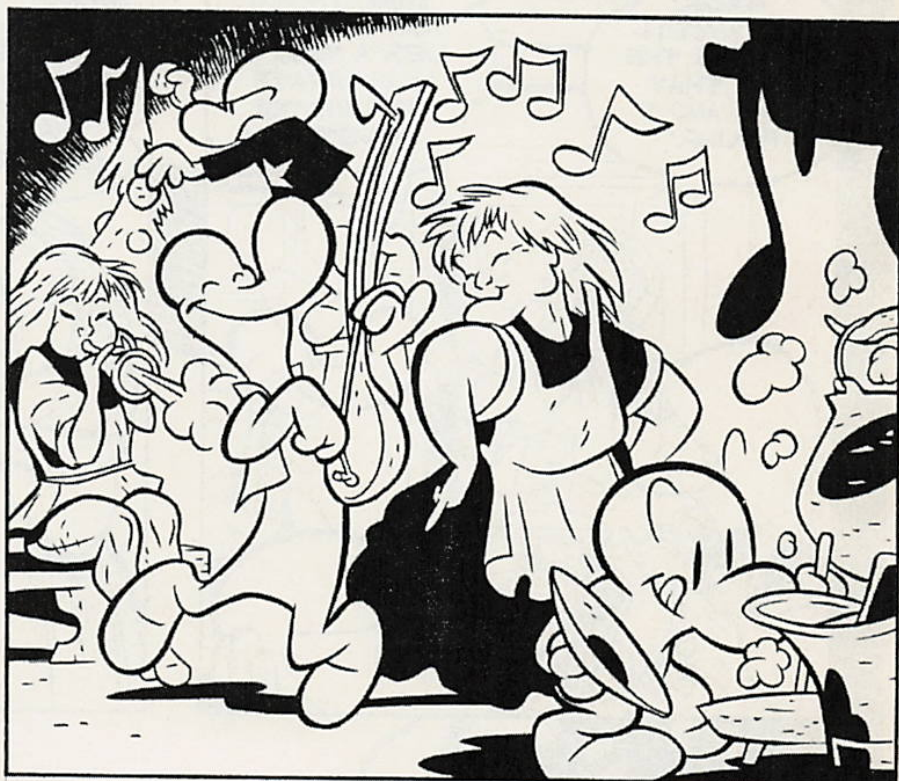
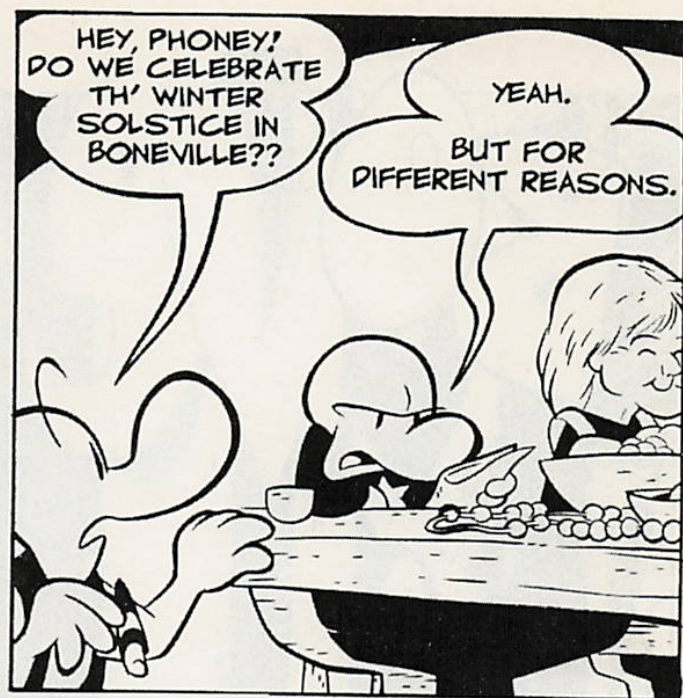
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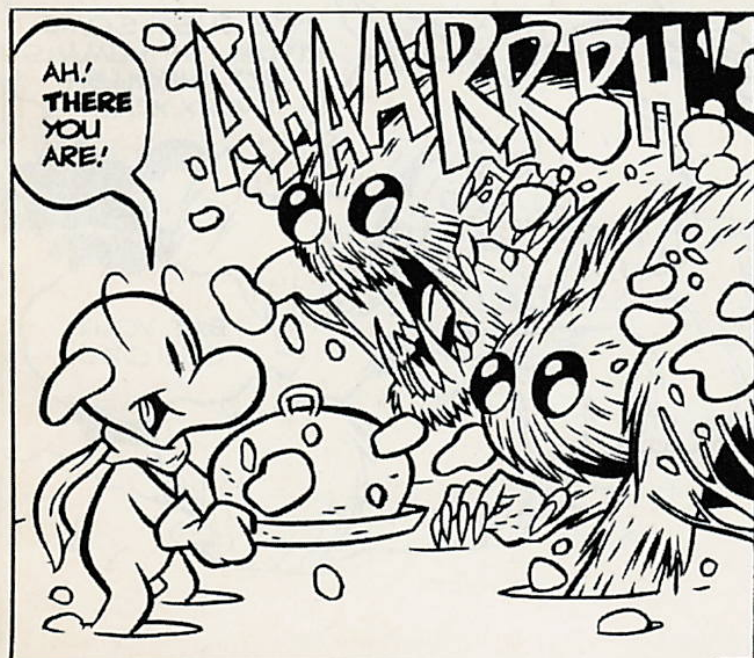
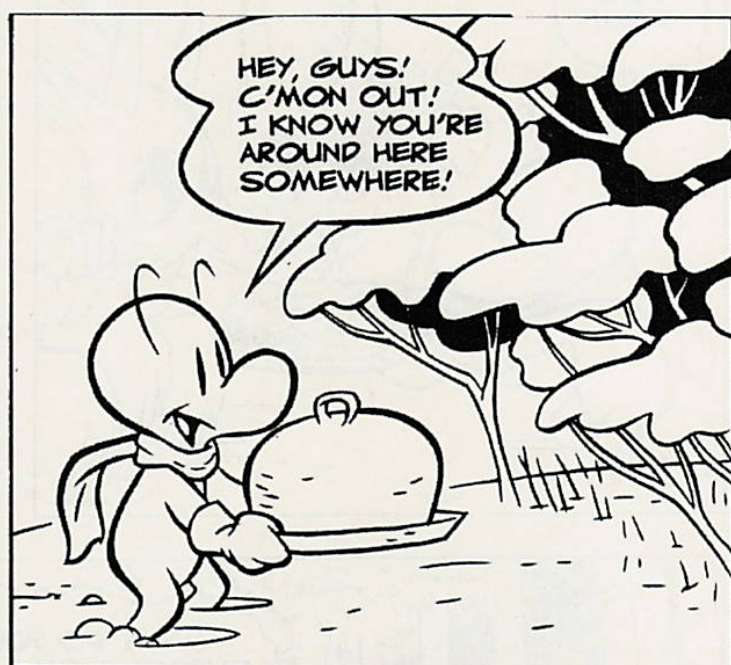




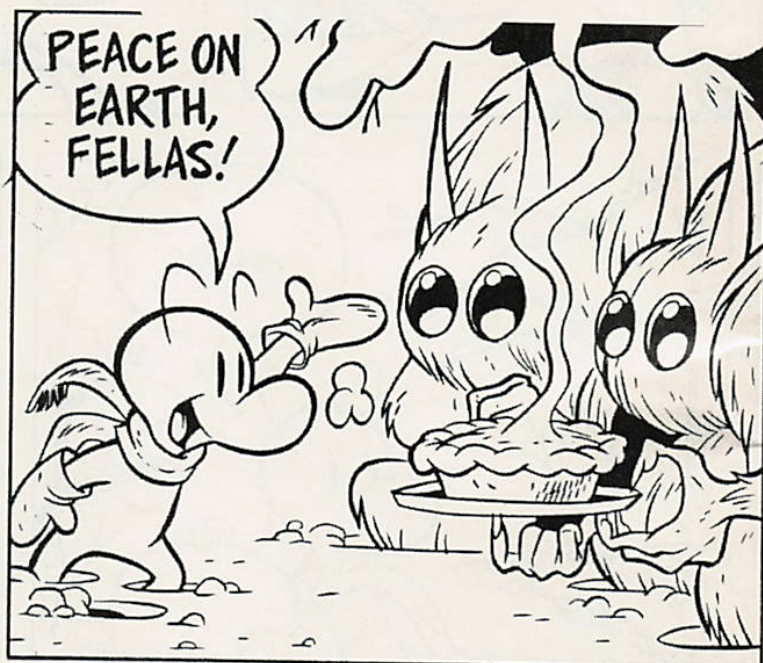
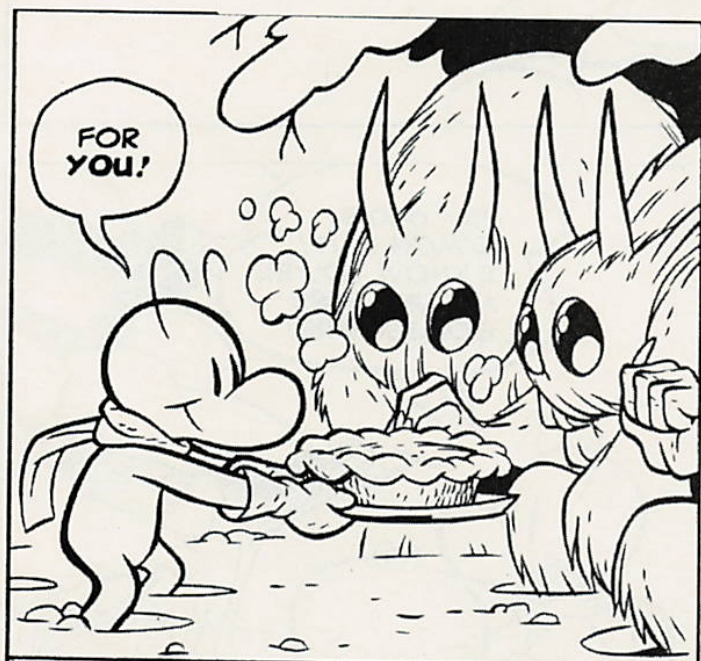
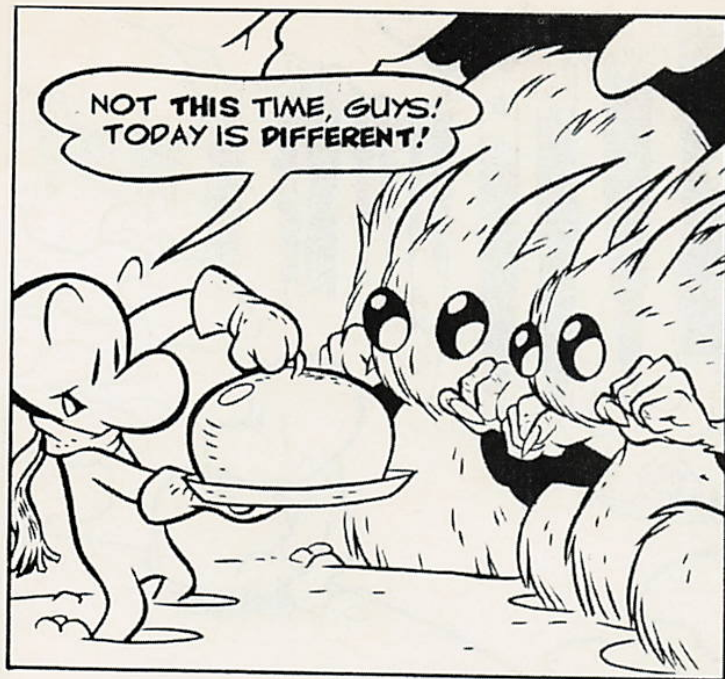
















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# ANIMATION, ART, AND

# BONE

AN INTERVIEW WITH BONE CREATOR  
JEFF SMITH

BY FRANK KURTZ

(WITH ARBITRARY DRAWINGS BY JEFF SMITH)

**FK:** What is the origin of **Bone**? Where does it all begin? Where did it start for you?

**JS:** I remember that when I was younger I used to watch a lot of cartoons on TV, like *Mighty Mouse* and *Bugs Bunny*. And I used to go back East a lot, like to Connecticut and Massachusetts where I have family, and they had much, much better cartoons than I had in Ohio. I mean, going there on summer vacations there was just a riot because, like, they had cartoons to watch all day. When I was a kid, they had cartoons on Saturday mornings, and that was it. So for two weeks out of the year I would go to Connecticut, where they would have cartoons all day.

**FK:** They didn't have any kid's shows on?

**JS:** I grew up in Columbus, Ohio. That's where I was born. We're talking when I was three and four years old. They had Saturday morning cartoons - *Mighty Mouse*, *Heckle & Jeckle*, *Bugs Bunny*. *Space Ghost*, and that stuff came later. But I would go back to New England where they would get New York television. They would have, *Hercules*, and *Speed Racer*, and - um, some really frightening show. They'd do this close up of people's faces, only their lips moved.

**FK:** That was *Clutch Cargo*!

**JS:** I couldn't see those where I lived, and I used to really love going there. Also, my grandmother, whose house I would be at, would just... I'd always get there and she'd have just this big pile of paper she'd bring home from the office. Seriously, like a two foot tall stack - or at least it seemed that way when I was real



small, and that's all I did for two weeks. I would go there and trip out on cartoons. It was almost magical to go somewhere that was isolated like that and just be submerged in cartoons, and given paper and being told to just go for it.

The reason I told that whole story is because I wanted to make a cartoon character. I don't know, I must have made up hundreds of them just like a lot of kids do. One of them I made up was *Fone Bone*, and he just stuck with me. Basically he's the same - bald, dot eyes, big nose, pear-shaped guy. I think his body was purple and he had stick arms. But he was one of just hundreds of little cartoons characters that I would just draw. For some reason he just stuck with me and I developed a little world around him, based sort of, on Disney's type of a land. You know, like *Duckburg*. So there's a little cartoon land, like *Duckburg*, and I had other little *Bones* that all lived there. I can't remember what they all were - *Flying Bone*, *Happy Bone*,

other *Bones* existed there.

**FK:** Were some of the other *Bones*, like *Phoney Bone* and *Happy Bone*, were they there at the time or was that something you created...

**JS:** They came pretty quickly after that. I had a friend like in about the third grade named *Mike Brooks*, and he liked comic books. He and I liked comic books together. Since I had *Fone Bone*, he made up this sort of *Anti-Bone*, *Phoney Bone*. And he just started drawing him and he as a negative of mine. He really didn't have a personality, he was just kinda like *Scrooge McDuck*, just rich. *Smiley Bone* was there then too, so we're talking like by the third grade the three *Bones* in *Boneville* were pretty much all there. I have some comic books that I drew back then, all the personalities are there. I mean, it looks like it was drawn by a third grader, but the personalities are pretty much the way they are now. It wasn't until college, when I



had an opportunity to do a daily strip, and I thought, "Oh, I'm gonna go get, Fone Bone." I continued to draw Fone Bone throughout High School and stuff, but not like I did when I was a kid. That kind of got left behind, drawing your own comic books and that kind of stuff.

**FK:** One thing just occurred to me, and you can tell me just, "No way, you're wrong!" It seems like the three bones that you have, it's like Fone is like Mickey Mouse, Phoney is like Donald Duck or a Scrooge McDuck, and Smiley is like Goofy - but not dumb.

**JS:** I think it's like Mickey, Donald, and Goofy, but that wasn't planned. I've actually fought that since the actual comic book has come out. I'm looking at it going, "These are archetypes, cartoon archetypes, just like Mickey, Donald, and Goofy. In a lot of ways, I think their personalities are subtly different. But basically, yeah, I think they fit those same three archetypes. Those same three archetypes probably fit into a lot of cartoon character types. Bugs, Daffy, and... I don't know who the third one would be. You can go into **Doonesbury** and find those same three. You can go into **Peanuts** and find those same three.

**FK:** That's true, they do seem to show up over and over again. I'm trying to think of the third one, but you're right. There's the cool guy, or

maybe the control guy, which is what Mickey is. He's like the basic good guy.

**JS:** Like Pogo. Then you've got the big doof, which is like Albert or Goofy or Smiley Bone. Then you've got the cranky ego. Which I guess in **Pogo** is like everybody except for Pogo.

**FK:** So you say you were reading comic books back then. What kind of stuff were you reading?

**JS:** In the third grade? It was like, **Uncle Scrooge**. It was about the sixth grade or so that I discovered Neal Adams and superheroes, so I got into **Batman** and **Green Lantern** and **Deadman**, whatever he was doing. I had to get a Neal Adams. Then I'd say about in seventh grade I had completely forgotten about comics. I just moved on.

**FK:** I'm curious, had you just shaken off the funny animal stuff?

**JS:** It was about the fourth grade that somebody brought in a copy of **Pogo**. **Prehysterical Pogo**: It was that year's collected comics from **Pogo**. That floored me. That just stunned me. I couldn't believe how thick it was. I mean, it was just like a huge amount of comics, not like a comic book, and it was black and white. Somehow the black and white always interested me more than the color. Walt Kelly's artwork in there was as good as it gets. I was just

fascinated by that. That was funny animals. I quickly understood, even in the fourth grade, that this was something that you didn't have to be embarrassed about. This was really adult and intelligent.

**FK:** Were you reading any of the **Peanuts** books at that time too?

**JS:** I practically learned to read from reading **Peanuts** books when I was younger. I wanted

to read those so bad—those little paperback books that Fawcett used to put out.

**FK:** I wonder about guys who draw comics. I'm sure everyone was exposed to some of the funny animal kind of stuff; the Disney books. But what is it that makes the guys who do humor?

**JS:** That's just the way it works. I think people just forget that they like that stuff. I mean, when we were kids, Sunday night Walt Disney show would come on, right? And if it was a cartoon it was magical, because those were good! The way they moved was amazing. It was impossible to believe that was happening, that cartoons worked that way. It still is, even as adults. But in the early '60s, as kids, that was just unbelievable.

**FK:** Always, a reason to get excited was when they'd show the cartoons on Disney.

**JS:** Yeah, I mean, "Tonight, is Disney a cartoon show tonight, or is it gonna be **Pollyanna** or something?" You know, **Son of Flubber**. There were these cartoons, and you wanted them bad. The comic book, then, was the closest thing you could get to those Disney cartoons, that magic. I'm talking about the real magic, not the "Hey, you will believe that this is magic" crap that they force down your throat now. But those books really were good! If you read those, the good Duck stories, the long Duck stories, they were really, really good!

**FK:** You read a lot of comics, you're sort of outgrowing it a little bit. It's never completely gone, but you're at school, and you're getting into a sort of formal art education.

**JS:** Yeah, I had some memory of wanting to be, you know, a **real** artist. What are you gonna do? You can't do cartoons, because nobody encourages you in that direction. My art teachers didn't really encourage me in that direction. I had a couple of art teachers that were decent people, but their encouragement was kind of... they only tried to help me when they couldn't change my mind, and even then they didn't. I had an art teacher that actually stopped me from going to Disney,





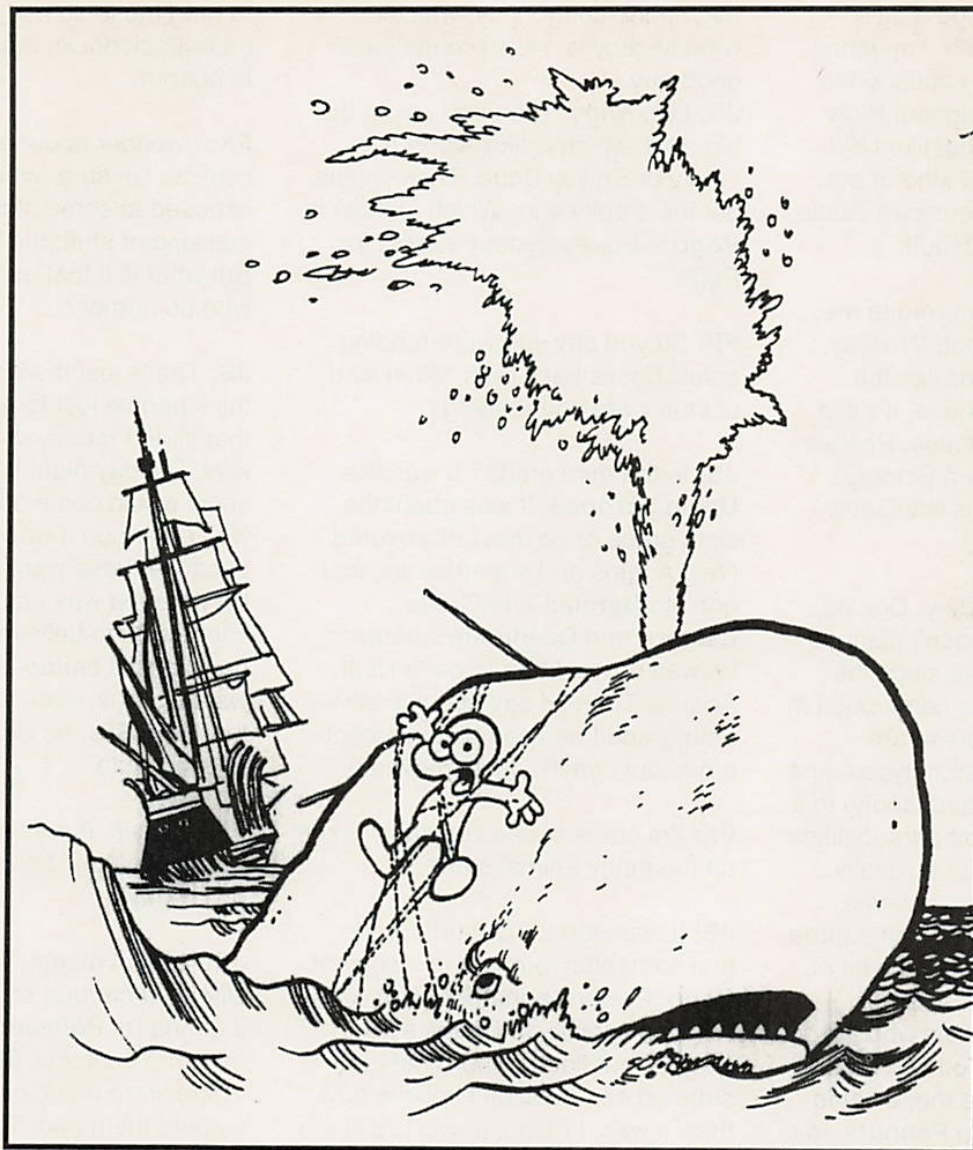
'cause he said, "Look, you're not gonna fit in there, I just know. You don't believe me, but just don't do it." I'm actually very glad that he stopped me. I would not have fit in. I needed to go do my own stuff, my own stories.

**FK:** So, you were doing a strip in the paper, you were an art student, now what was your major as far as being an art student?

**JS:** First of all, in High School I got a scholarship to the Columbus College of Art and Design, which is a world-class art college. In fact, it's this huge place now in the nineties where Disney, as well as some of the biggest ad agencies go to recruit. If you got through this school, you were going to get a good career in commercial art or fine art, but once I got there, I realized that was it. You were funneled one of two ways: you were either a fine artist, or you were a commercial artist. Cartooning was just not in there; animation was not considered "real." Any kind of cartooning was not considered art. It's not anything. You can't even talk about it, you know what I mean? That bugged me right off the bat, because I did like cartooning. **Heavy Metal** was in like the late seventies. That may have been the first thing to start, recurring me to want to do fantasy and comics again. I had lost interest in high school.

**FK:** It was like an "acceptable" comic book out there.

**JS:** Well, it just reminded me. It wasn't just acceptable, it was good!



There was Bilal, and Moebius, and I'm looking at that going, "Man, this is good stuff!" It reminded me that I wanted to do cartoons. I couldn't even talk about it in college. It was maddening. Like I said, in college your two choices were: Learn how to use an airbrush and render beautiful electric lady's shavers, or the fine arts which bite. Have you been in a museum lately? It just bites! There's nothing going on, especially in the late seventies and the early eighties. Just mindless garbage. It was more important to write an exposition about what your art was than the actual art. People joke about, "Well, I threw something on the canvas and it stuck and that was the art." That's really what it was. I don't know if it's quite that bad right now. I hated Modern Art, and that was the end of Modern Art. I hated it.

**FK:** I could appreciate the aesthetics sometimes, but I always doubted. It was like "The Emperor's New Clothes."

**JS:** Well look, the Modern Art period started in the twenties, the period

that we're talking about. Picasso. As in anything, there's always an original guy who did something and he was really, really good at it. Picasso is brilliant. There were a bunch of other Modernists that were really good too. But then other people started doing it, so it became a movement, and the other people didn't really get it. It's like in comics. Frank Miller and Alan Moore did gritty, realistic superheros in a real world. Now everybody's doing that but nobody else gets it. So nobody else does it well. Now you have a whole movement, and the movement just bites.

Except for **Dark**

**Knight and Watchmen.** They were good. But everything else that people have done, they don't get it. It was just those first two guys. In the art world it was just the same way.

**FK:** It shows in the comic market. It's not like in the fine art world where people can justify it to a certain degree because they can say, "I'm just pursuing my artistic feelings." In the comic world it's more of a commercial approach. It's like, "Well, if this works, let's do it."

**JS:** There is no question that there is a division between the high art and the low art. The low arts are, of course, the arts of the masses. They're the folk art; they're what the common people see. The high arts are dead, and the low arts are where all the action is. That's where everything is at. The low arts are alive and happening. In America, pop culture—which is the mass arts, the low arts—that's where it's all at. I came to that realization while I was in art college, and said I was going to pursue where I think the action is.



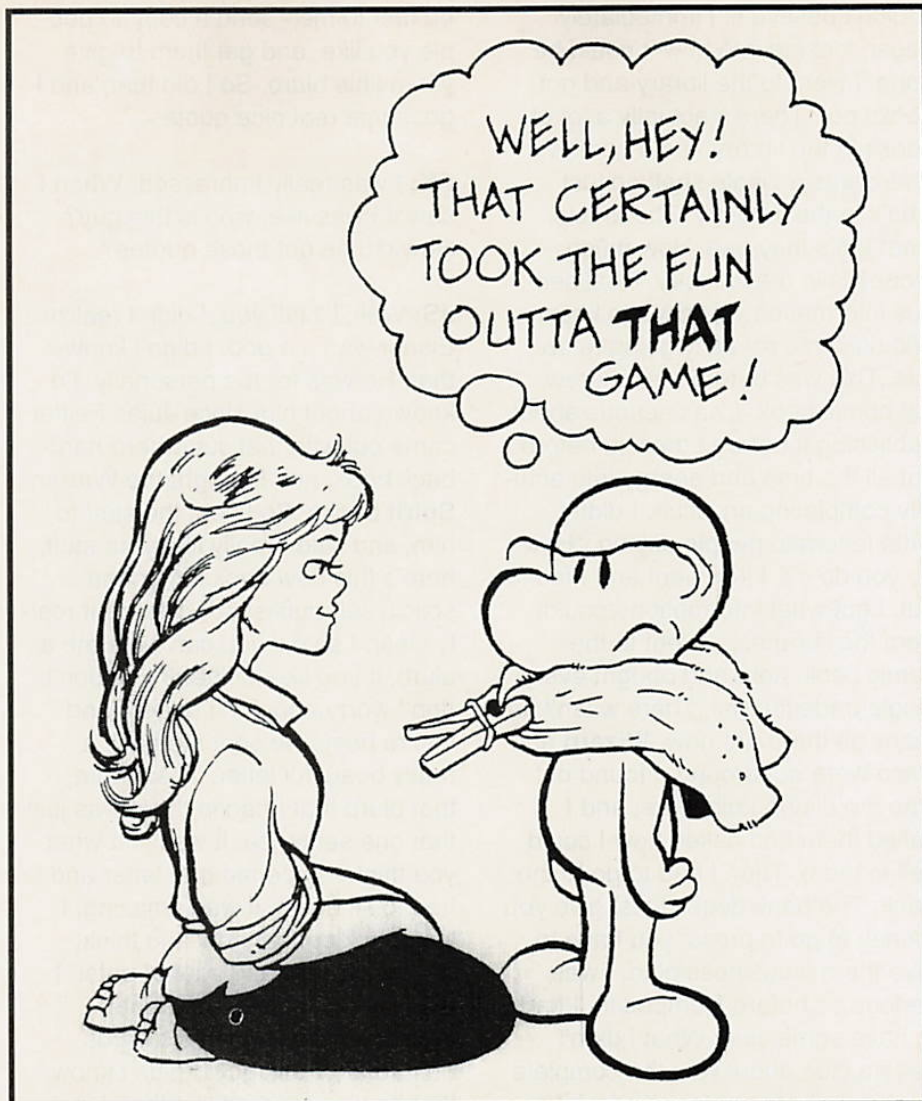
It's not happening in commercial art, which is dead creatively. It's not happening in fine arts, which is a completely lost thing. There's nothing going on there. That's when I actively began to pursue cartoons again.

**FK:** When you were in school, is that when you first started toying around with animation? Had you done that before?

**JS:** It was in college. I was always interested in it, I always had an equal fascination with cartoons and comic books. They're both the same. They both have different magical powers. Obviously in the animation it's movement. In the books there's different magical things. They were both pretty much equal to me, and also indistinguishable. So I just kind of diddled around with both. I'd do flip books, or play around with a Super 8 camera I got. I locked the pages and registration down below on an eight millimeter camera and played with it. Then OSU - Ohio State, where I went - had this electronic animation scoreboard for the stadium, for the Buckeyes. They had really limited animation on there, like "CHARGE!" or "BLOCK THAT KICK!" You know, stuff that you see at the ball games, on the computer screen. Jim Temory, who was a buddy of mine that I drew cartoons with since the fourth grade, approached me and said "Let's go to the athletic department and see if they'll let us play on this board." So we did, and we had a good time. We got a bunch of books and all the equipment, and the next thing you knew, someone came up to us and asked us to do a little project and paid us for it. Through that we met another guy, Martin Fuller, who actually knew how to run a **real** animation camera. From there it just snowballed. We started doing jobs, and Martin said "Hey, this is working, so let's start our own company." We were the only animation studio in Ohio. So we started doing local commercials, and slowly expanded until we were doing national stuff and working on feature films.

**FK:** Which films did you do?

**JS:** We did one scene out of **Ferngully**. We did quite a bit on **Rover Dangerfield**. A lot on **Bebe's**



**Kids**. But that was all right at the end for me, because I was doing **Bone** by then. Right after **Bebe's Kids**, I sold my share of the company to my partners, who were going great guns. Like I said, the difference between doing animated moving cartoons and still print cartoons was - there was no difference to me. They took the same kind of thinking. I actually preferred print cartoons, so I just kinda got back into that.

**FK:** So, when you were doing **Bone**, were you doing this with the purpose of creating a comic book to sell, or were you doing it just to do it?

**JS:** I was doing animation and it was fun, but it was a lot of work. We attempted to do a **Bone** short. But I realized I just wasn't ready to lead that kind of an effort. Animation is a huge undertaking. It takes a lot of money, and a lot of cooperation from a lot of people. I started thinking, "You know, this is going to take forever to do one little story." As a comic book, I could just do it, and it would be there. I could be the Art Director, I could be the Background

Painter, I could be the Scriptor, I could do the whole thing. I would be the Director, and I can just have it be done. So I started doing it. Basically, it was because I wanted to do my own stories and my own characters, not a commercial spokescharacter, and actually do it. I realized it was too hard to do it as animation. That led me towards a comic book. I didn't think, "Oh, I'm just going to do this at home." I knew I was going to create it and publish it.

I had read **The Tick** and I thought it was just a riot! This Ben Edlund is having a ball. It's black and white, it's got color covers. I went to the comic book store and I looked around, and I saw that there were other black and white comics. This was like in '88 or something. It's fuzzy now. I saw **Cerebus** and other black and white books and I said, "Okay, there is a market for this. This is doable." Self-publishing - you know, I can't believe this system exists. I did a little homework into it and I started finding things out. I discovered there's a system in place for creative freedom and growth. I



couldn't believe it. I immediately began looking into how it could be done. I went to the library and got books out. There's actually a lot of books in the library about comics. There was a whole shelf on just who's in the industry. The artists, what tools they use. How much money is in the industry. Real serious information you have to know and do if you're really going to do this. This was before I even drew the comic book. I was serious about publishing it before I drew it, before I put all the time and energy into actually completing an issue. I didn't write letters to people saying, "How do you do it?" I just went and I found out. I got what information I could from the libraries: I went to the comic book store and bought every single trade journal. There wasn't as many as there are now, **Wizard** and **Hero** were not around. I found out who the distributors were, and I called them and asked how I could sell to them. Then I had to go to the bank. The bank doesn't just give you money to go to press; you have to give them a business plan. I was serious so before I jumped in, I had to have some clue. What I didn't have a clue about was the complete destruction of the black and white market that had just occurred. I was getting old information off of microfilm, and I did not know that there was a black-and-white bust. I was just reading about the boom, and about how the Batman movie and the Turtles movie were out and it was great. The first year was really rough, but then it kinda got going.

**FK:** Well, I noticed when I first heard of Bone and when I saw advertising for it, you had quotes from Will Eisner. Were you sending preview copies out to people?

**JS:** Yeah, yeah. I actually sent ... I guess you would call it an ashcan. I made up some ashcan copies and sent them to - one to Will Eisner, one to Bill Watterson, one to Kim Dietch, because I wanted to cover three types of cartooning. I wanted to cover Watterson for strips, because I like comic strips a lot. Eisner was comic books in my mind, and Dietch was part of the avant garde underground. So I sent those out, and I figured it would help me if I had quotes from people. In fact, I think one of the distributors suggest-

ed that to me - send a copy to people you like, and get them to give you a little blurb. So I did that, and I got some real nice quotes.

**FK:** I was really impressed. When I saw it I was like, who is this guy? How did he get those quotes?

**JS:** Well, I'll tell you, I didn't realize Eisner was... a god. I didn't know that. He was for me personally. I'd known about him since Jules Feiffer came out with that superhero hard-back book, and I bought the Warren **Spirit** books. So I sent the stuff to him, and said I really like your stuff, here's this new book I'm gonna solicit, self-published - I made it really clear. I said, if you can write me a blurb, if you like it, fine. If you don't, don't worry about it. I understand you're busy. He sent me back a really beautiful letter. That quote, that blurb that I had in there was just that one sentence. It was just what you think - I opened that letter and I had to sit down. It was amazing. I look back on that now and think, "Damn, I really had a lot of guts!" I didn't know there were Eisner awards, that there were awards named after this guy. I didn't know that he was revered like that. I just personally liked him, and probably would have never had the nerve to write to him. Of course, I'm really glad it worked out that way.

**FK:** As it ended up it worked out pretty nice, eventually. Like you said, it was kind of rough.

**JS:** I waded in at the worst possible time, and it was very hard. I had to have a full time job, running the animation studio. The animation studio was, like, a twelve - sixteen hour a day job, seven days a week. Somehow, **Bone** came out more on schedule when I was doing that. But the publishing side of **Bone** has grown huge in, like, the last six months. It actually takes up more time than drawing it.

**FK:** Here are some of the questions you've probably heard a million times. Are you planning on going back to Fone Bone's home town and showing it?

**JS:** No.

**FK:** No, not at all?

**JS:** No, not at all.

**FK:** So we're never going to see the money bin or...

**JS:** No.

**FK:** I just think of Duckburg.

**JS:** That's why. I never said there was a money bin, but you just pictured one. That's exactly why I'm not going to go back there, because you're going to picture it better and in more fun ways than I can. Plus, that's not the story I'm telling. I'm telling about what happens when you leave a sheltered place and go out into the real world, an outside world. That's the story I'm talking about. You're just going to picture Boneville better than I did. I didn't start out that way. I kinda thought I might show Boneville, especially around the sixth issue when I explained the circumstances behind them getting run out of town. I was thinking about doing a flashback. But two things happened. As I went along, I decided I didn't like flashbacks, sort of like the same decision that I wasn't going to use thought balloons, and I wasn't going to use exposition panels. I mean, not narrative, "Meanwhile..." By about the third issue I had decided on the format, that I wouldn't have any of those things. I didn't want to have flashbacks or thought balloons, so I couldn't do the flashback to Boneville.

**FK:** Well, the feeling I get is that it is sort of a picturesque little Disney town, which is sort of contemporary with technology, as opposed to the sort of Middle Ages they're in right now.

**JS:** Then that's good, because that's exactly how I pictured it. I got that across, anyway.

**FK:** It seems to be sort a status quo sort of situation in self-published stuff, but do you have a set amount of issues in your head that you want, or are you just sort of, "Let it go."

**JS:** I'm just letting it go. It's this loose: It's going to be between sixty and one-hundred issues. In other words, I want to do it for about ten years, although I can see it extend-



ing. It just depends on how my ideas keep coming. I have a lot of different kinds of stories I want to tell. So I've got a good run still to go. When I run out of these ideas, I have this ending. If it ever runs out of juice or stops working, I have this ending that can go into play. I have certain story points that have to happen every so often to lead up to this ending. In between those story points I just want to come up with different types of stories to go between them.

**FK:** It seems to me, that a lot of stuff just sort of comes along that you never anticipated coming along.

**JS:** Like the Cow Race. I never anticipated doing the Cow Race. I just thought Grandma Ben was a weird old lady, she raised cows, and maybe there **was** a cow race. But I was never going to show it, it was just a joke. But as it went, it just had to happen. I just got myself going where I just had to draw this cow race. Things like that will hopefully come up all the time.

**FK:** That's the thing I noticed that **Bone** has. There are these underlying things going on that we're not privy to. Things you've really been thinking about, like the dragons, and the rats, and the path, and what's going on there without revealing anything as yet. Just sort of tipping us off, but not dwelling on it. I notice here you show us stuff about the dragon, like the flashback stuff in the past, but you've gone on to the Mystery Cow story, so you don't get stuck on it.

**JS:** The backstory is pretty much all figured out. I know what that is, I know what the conflict is. I know what the final ending is. The whole rest of the comic, I can just do fun stories. I can talk about all the things I want to talk about, do experimental type things. That's mostly just spontaneous. My hope is that the story will feel spontaneous and still have the structure, you know, the traditional story. That way it'll still feel good. Just moving through the story is kinda like the point to me. Each event that happens to Fone Bone is what is happening for him at the moment. I've just got to make sure to allow his character to develop and move the story along. The Cow Race, that was spontaneous. The

reason I did it is because it did move the story along. I've seen a lot of fantasy stories, **Lord of the Rings** quest types, and oftentimes the basic format is: A little group of friends go on a quest to defeat the big enemy. You never see the world that's in danger. You never meet the villagers. Or, the big sorcerer's going to conquer the world, and make everyone into slaves. But if you don't know who the slaves are going to be, the people that are in danger, it's hard to care. That's part of the reason I'm using the Cow Race, even though it's just completely stupid hijinx. It actually has a huge "Move the Story" purpose, in that once this is over with you will have seen a day in the town, you'll have met a lot of the people. You'll actually have a memory that there is a town, and that there are people there who are in danger.

**FK:** The other thing is that it sheds light on each one of the characters, gives you more of an insight into each of them. Grandma Ben is very confident in herself, or she appeared to be. You shed a little light on her personality because of the doubts that she's having towards the race.

**JS:** Again, any time that I do anything I try to make it add to the character development.

**FK:** So even when nothing happens to someone... well, you always have something happen to them.

**JS:** Even cliffhangers don't have to be - though I've actually done literally cliff hanging. I think a cliffhanger can be just a moment of character development. Like the one book that closes on all the characters

going to sleep at night in the room in the tavern. Nothing happens, it's just a pause. But you consider the characters and what they're thinking about. That's as much fun, and just as suspenseful as... suspense is not the right word, but "Oh, what happens next?" Just as much as like a big explosion.

**FK:** Like when you show Bone laying there on the floor next to the fire with that sort of look on his face.

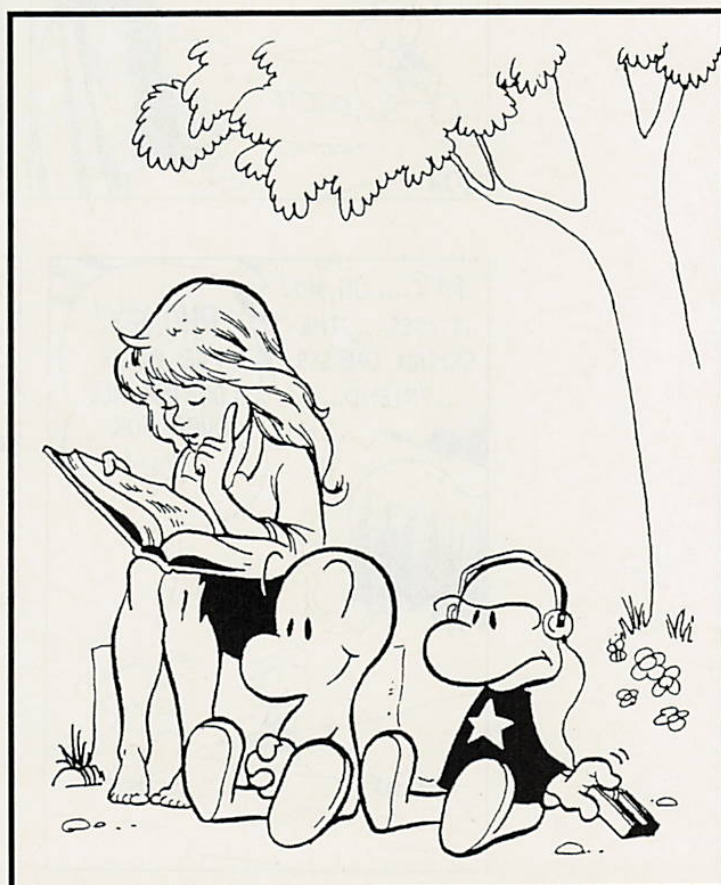
**JS:** Yeah, you really don't know exactly what he's thinking, but you know that he **is** thinking.

**FK:** At that point you also have something that clicks with people reading the book, because everyone's been there. Everyone doesn't just get to sleep. It's a situation where you go to bed and sometimes you just lay there going, "Man, what am I gonna... oh, gosh"

**JS:** Everyone's also been in a situation where you've been told a secret that's just, "Do I really want to know this? I've just been handed a burden."

**FK:** In closing, is there anything you would like to say to all of the would-be self-publishers?

**JS:** Yeah, do your homework! ▲





# EARLY BONE

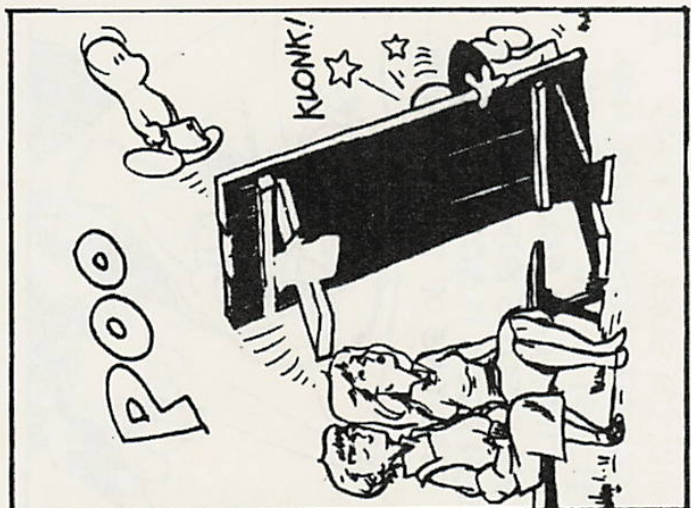
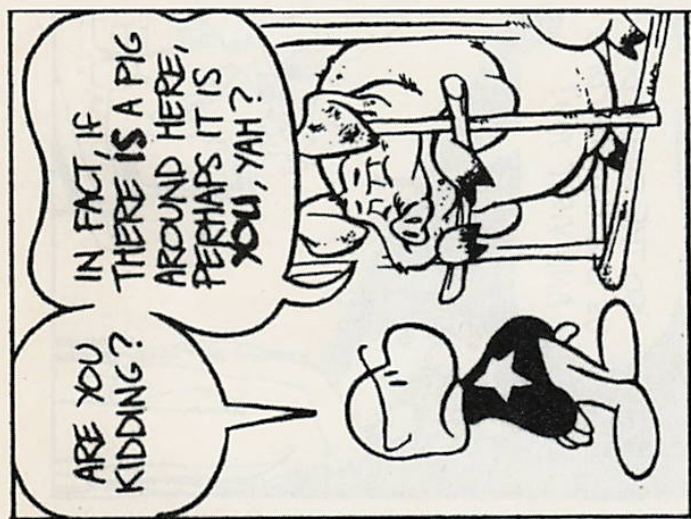
Here and on the next few pages are some of the earlier incarnations of the Bone Comic. Jeff Smith professes to creating the Bone cousins when he was in kindergarten or possibly before. The drawing on the left is from the sixties, and the one below is an early strip.

Pages fifteen and sixteen contain some of the early Thorn strips. It was here that the characters truly started to take the form of those in the comic book today.

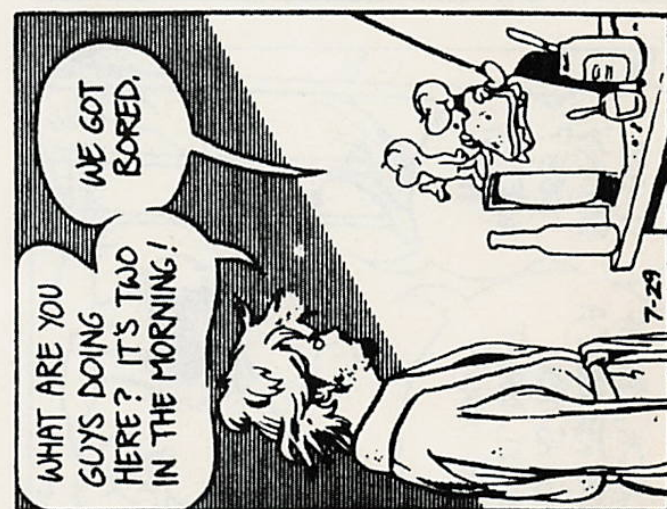
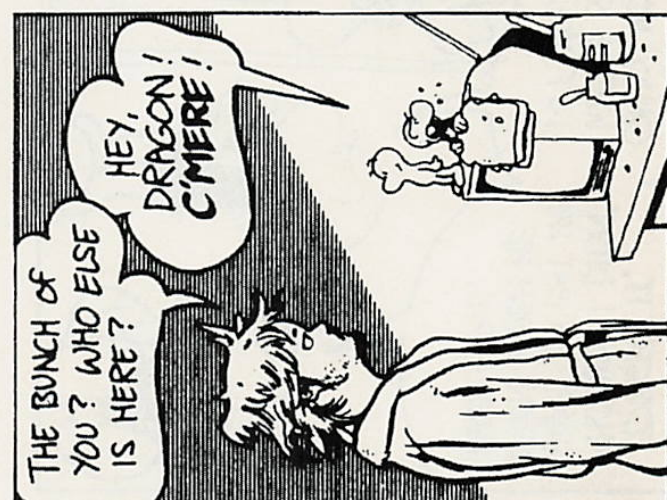
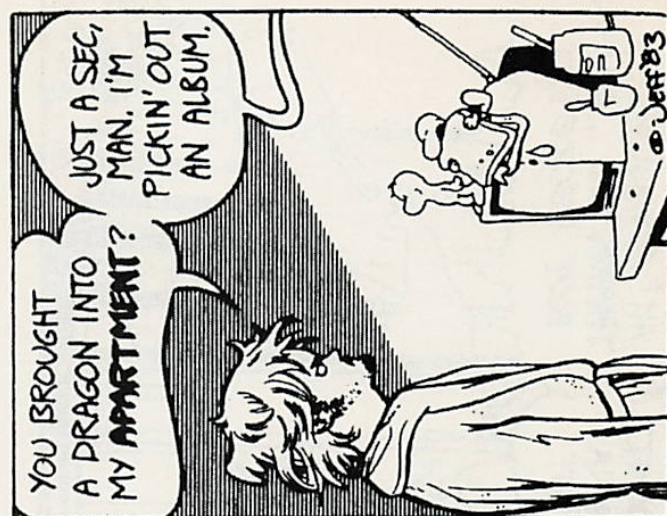
Writing and drawing Bone has given Jeff opportunities that continue to grow as do the group of fans who enjoy the crazy cousins from Boneville.





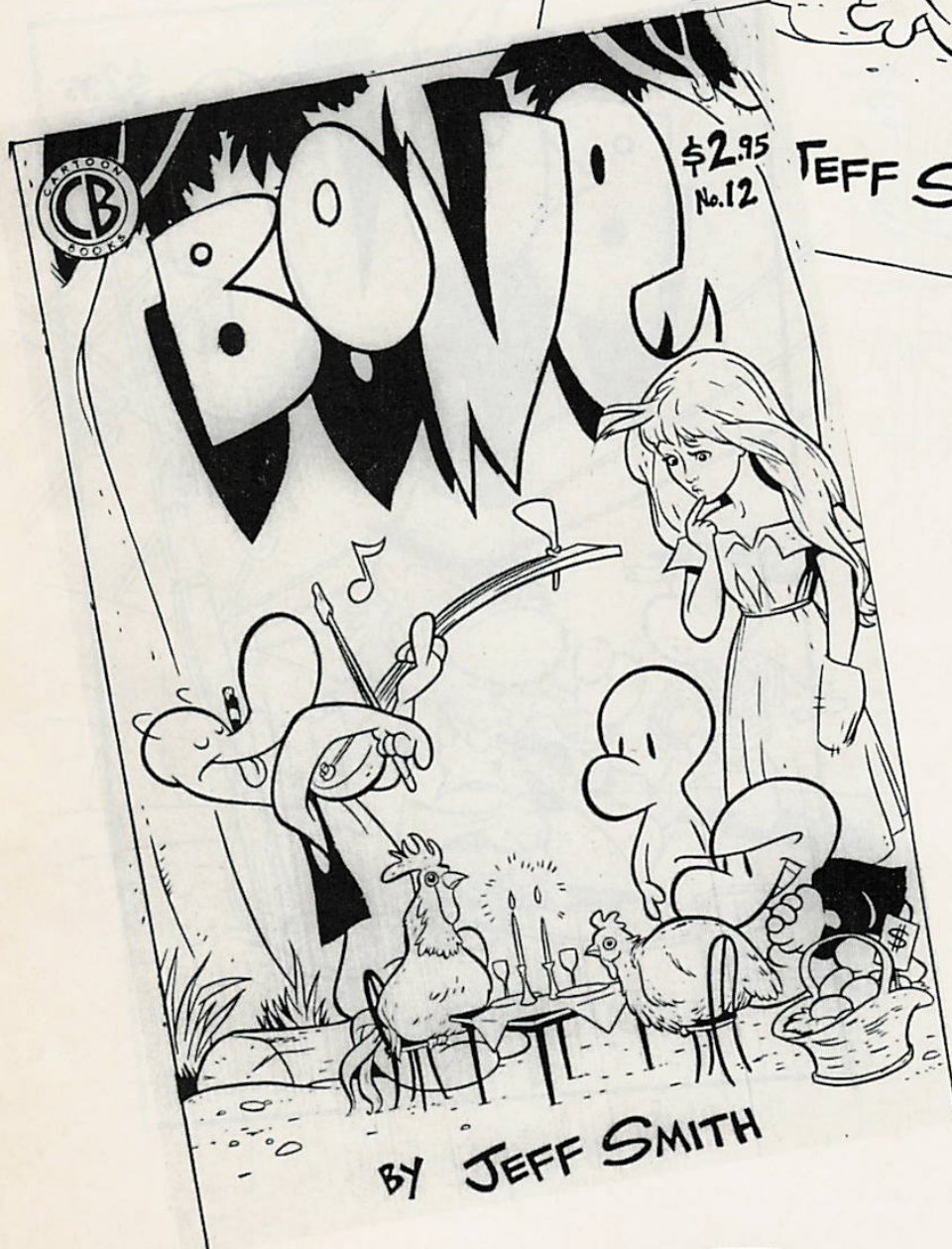
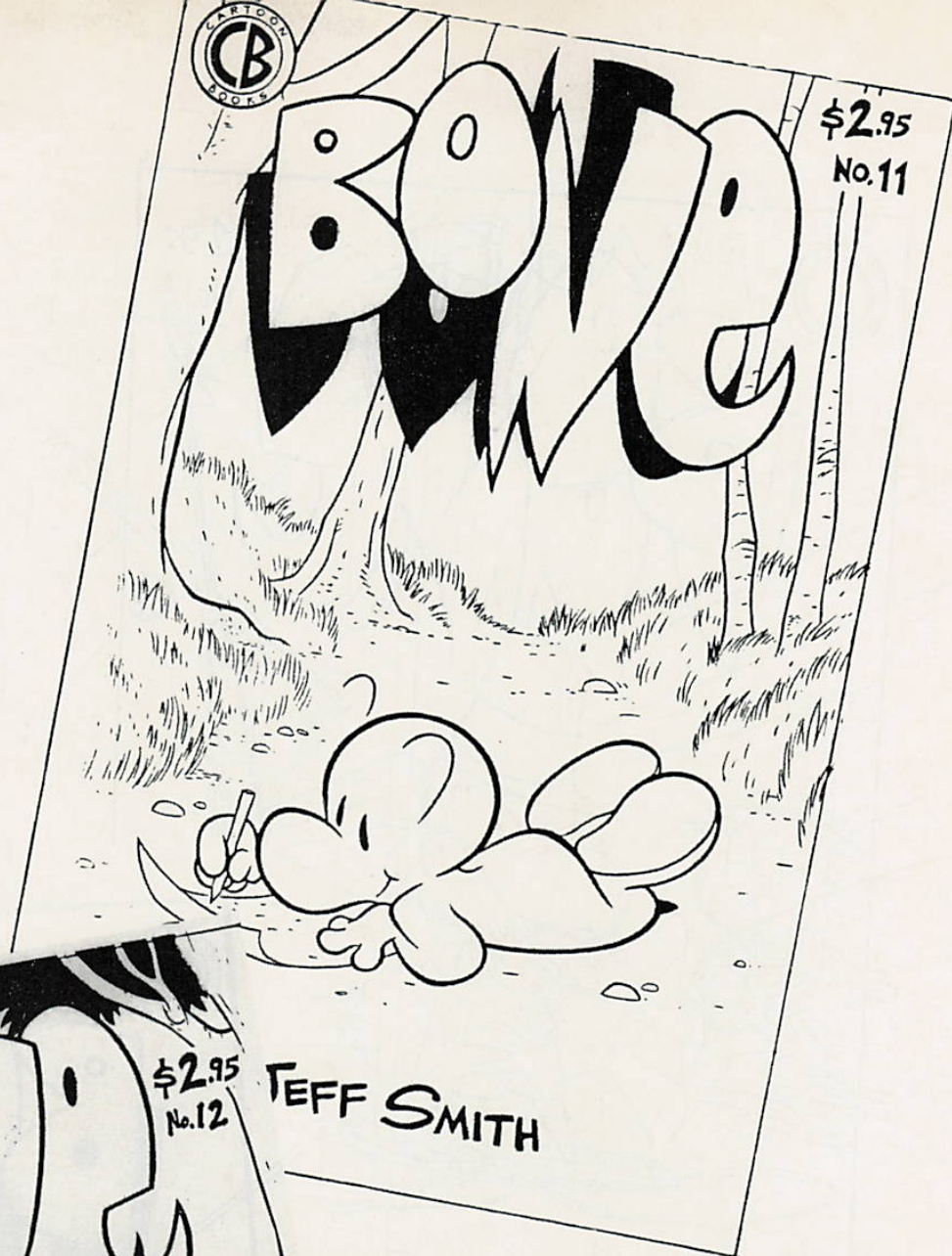




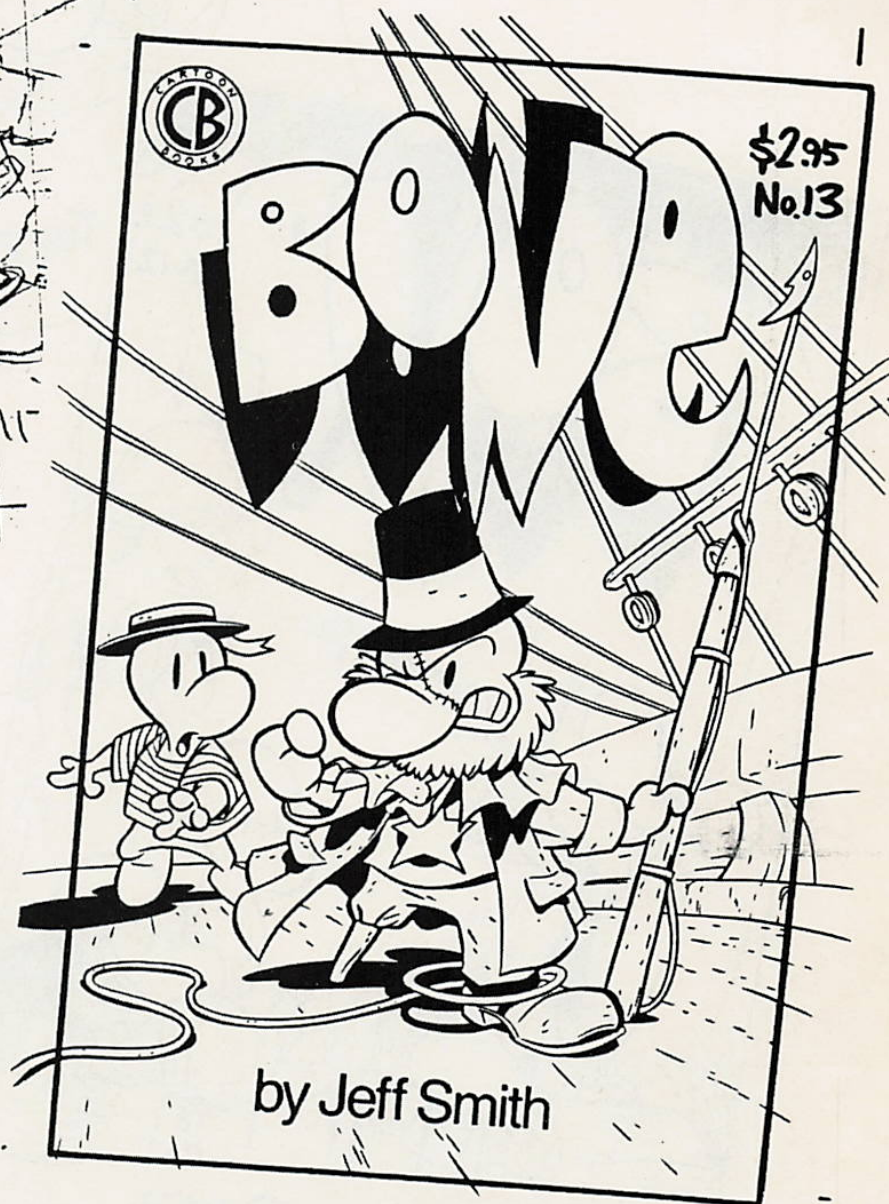
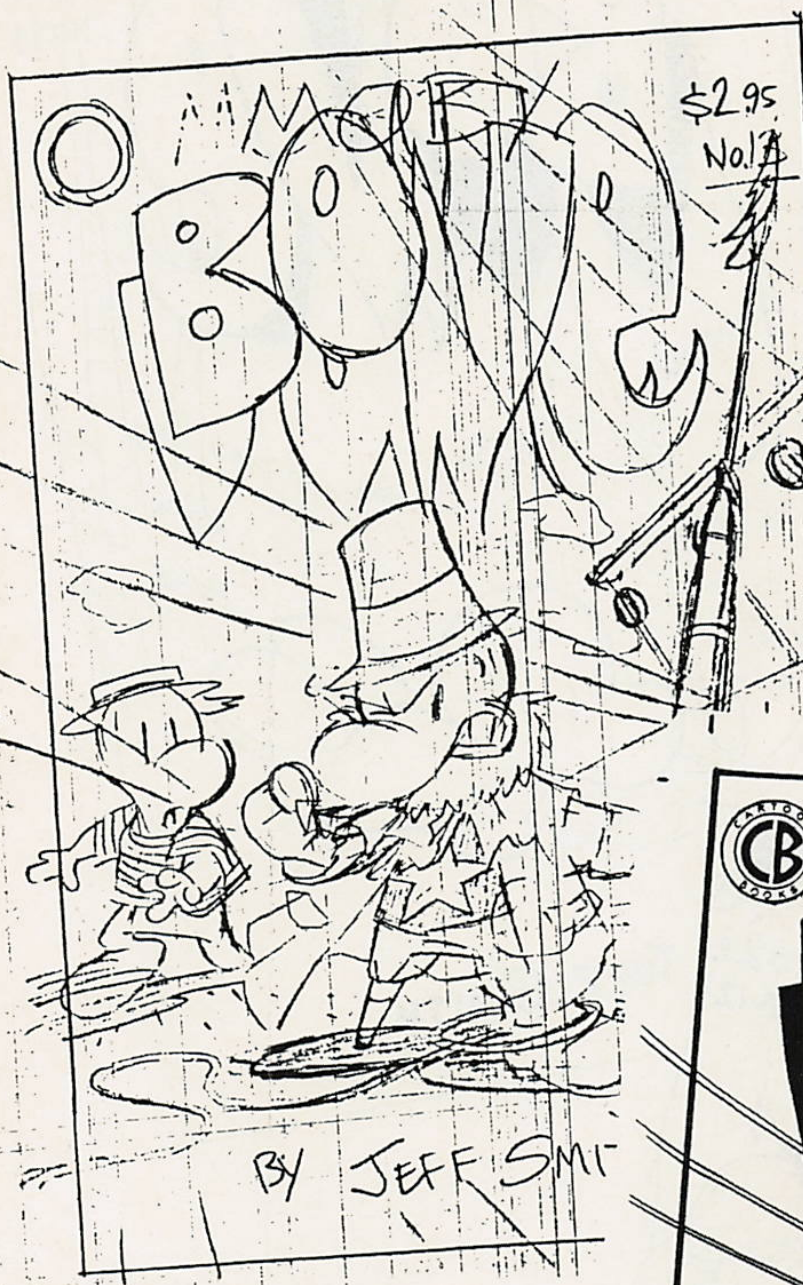




**AS A  
SPECIAL  
ADDED BONUS,  
JEFF SMITH  
WANTED TO  
GIVE HERO  
READERS A  
SNEAK-PEAK  
OF THE NEXT  
THREE  
FABULOUS  
BONE COVERS!**









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